771 In the Introduction, concepts of folk and national culture were presented. In Mexican Indian cultures the most distinctive aspects of folk religion are to be found in what we might call unorganized religion, i. e., those beliefs and rituals calling only for private ceremonials which are not connected with the Church and related ceremonial groups; they usually center around technological or life cycle activities. For instance, agricultural rites or concepts of diseases and ways of curing them are fields where more folk culture, and also more pre-Spanish survivals, are found.

771 177 Among the Tarascans, their connection with national life, greater than that of other Indian groups, has meant greater acculturation to the national culture. Technological rites are almost non-existent. One finds only miscellaneous beliefs about cooking, the hearth, or the influence of the [241] moon on plants. Only corn agriculture has a few more religious associations in the more conservative villages where idols are [821] kept in the cornfield and candles are lighted to them. There are also a number of [824] tales and beliefs about corn and the weather.

796 In the life cycle ceremonies the main religious aspects today are those of Catholicism (the sacraments). Only witchcraft and [754] some concepts of disease form any significant part of the folk religion, although [177] they are dominated by ideas about the saints and the Devil, and historically are of Spanish more than of Indian origin.

779 Unorganized (non-Church) religion is comparatively unimportant among the Tarascans. Most religion in the Tarascan culture has to be described in terms of the Church, a national (and international) institution with its own ideology, personnel, organization and particular interests. As it appears in Tarascan villages, there is a clear difference between national and folk components of religion. On the one hand are the priest and his connection to the hierarchy; and elements of the cult such as the sacraments, mass, rosary, etc., which follow the rules of the international Church. Other aspects of belief and ritual, on the other hand, though connected with those of the Church, are locally organized and peculiar to the local subculture. This is what we call folk Catholicism.

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779 Changes in this folk Catholicism are traceable to the influence of the economic and social changes previously discussed. In this chapter the cult, its organization, financing and relation to the government and to political conflict will be discussed, while religious ideology will be dealt with in the following chapter.

The most profound changes in the folk religion affect mainly the cult organization. The basic traits of the folk cult itself have not been greatly modified during the period covered in this paper, and are similar to those generally found in all Middle America. A description of them will provide a background on which to discuss them.

Main Traits of Tarascan Folk Religion and Cult[1]

776 Tarascan folk Catholicism, although accepting the Christian God (Tarascan, *Kuerájpiri*, Creator; Spanish, *Padre Eterno*, Eternal Father) as the supreme creator, revolves primarily around the saints. The saints are sons of God, also those who followed Christ when he came to earth, and in general people who lived sometime in the past and 'won sanctity'. A male saint is called in Tarascan *tata diósa*, literally 'father or lord god', a term which also can be applied to the Creator. Female saints are called *nana iuiísa*, 'mother or lady virgin', which means both the Virgin or any female saint. The mystery of the Trinity is not well known to the Tarascans. Christ is only the most important tata diósa. Sometimes he can be considered the same as God, but most often he is only his son. In some myths he is the brother of other saints like Saint James or even a brother of the Devil. Also it is not clear whether the various Christs venerated in different places are really the same God. The Christs of San Juan, Tingambato, Sopoco and Santa Fe, for instance, are said to be four brothers. Similarly the different local Virgins are to be considered as many different supernaturals.

776 As important as the supernatural being, 779 is its image kept in a church or chapel. It

1. Most information comes from the late nineteenth century and the present time. Information for the eighteenth century is scantier, but so far as available it shows great similarity with later times, so the following description, although written in the present tense, can be taken to apply in its basic traits to that period also.

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538 greater magical knowledge and were stronger, braver, and cleverer than the modern people.

These are the main types of narratives. Animal stories are another common type, similar to the Æsopian fable. They are considered fictitious and are told for their entertainment value. Usually they are funny and meant to make people laugh. When asked for tales (meaning fiction) many informants think most readily of this kind of story. Other types of tales, such as jokes, sexy stories, etc., are less common and are not used in this work as they do not reflect religious concepts.

771 Religious ideas are also expressed in
538 what in Spanish are called beliefs (*creencias*): items of lore giving bits of knowledge of the supernatural, as, for instance, omens or the wondrous qualities of certain animals. Sometimes these beliefs treat of a special behavior; for example, the rules about what a pregnant woman should or should not do, or the magical procedures to follow in a technological activity. These beliefs are to some people rules which have to be followed. For many people, however, they are just sayings one does not have to care about. They say, "This is just a belief," meaning "Some people say that, but it is not true."

538 Thus, folk narratives, an expression of the religious ideas of the people, can mean different things to different people. To those to whom a given tale is a true happening, it has a moral meaning and may sanction a certain kind of behavior. The same happening or tale may be to others an example of how superstitious people are. It will have no moral meaning, sanction, or behavior, although it may be told as an entertaining tale or piece of information.

538 The religious ideology expressed through such narratives will now be examined at
779 its face value, while the different attitudes of belief will later be discussed.

* * *

The general concepts of Tarascan folklore and religion are those of Catholicism. The Christian God created the world and the supernaturals, including the Devil and the saints. The fundamental Christian concept of good and evil is also paramount in Tarascan folklore and religion. This opposition of good and evil appears in a number of contrasts. Everything is classified as one or the other: God and the saints, the good supernaturals who inhabit

538 heaven, are opposed to the bad super-
779 naturals, the Devil and the demons in hell; the right Religion and the Church are set against superstition and lack of religion; good behavior against bad (sin); the idea of the good going to heaven at death against that of the sinful being punished in hell.

577 Ethical values are apparent in the rea-
538 sons given for the destruction of the world and the creation of the Devil, in the actions
[779] of the saints in rewarding good behavior and punishing evil, in the acts of the Devil in sponsoring bad behavior, and in the destiny of the dead.

Taking this concept of good and evil as the main theme, we can give an outline of practically the whole, and certainly the most important part, of Tarascan religious ideas. Nonethical concepts are few and of secondary importance. They are mainly miscellaneous beliefs or tales (in which some natural elements are personified), omens, and so on.

773 Creation stories are not common among
538 the Tarascans. In those collected, the concept of good and evil is apparent. The
577 duality of the supernatural—God and the saints against the Devil—is explained as the consequence of the bad behavior of one of the sons of God who revolted against his Father and was punished by being made into the Devil. Insubordination and lack of respect for paternal authority are the causes of this punishment.

In several myths about the creation of animals, the good animals are created by God while the bad ones are related to the Devil. Thus, when Jesus and the chil-
[825] dren of the Devil play making mud figures, those of Jesus become birds while those of the Devil become "snakes and lizards, and scorpions and all sorts of bad animals". The coyote was a dog which deserted his master, the Devil.

773 Most important are the myths regarding the destruction of the world. In these we
538 have a blend of Spanish and Indian elements in which the Indian motives, nonethical in origin, are reinterpreted and subordinated to the Catholic concept of Good and Evil. A number of stories give two destructions of the world. A first one by water is identified with the Christian flood, although it keeps also some traits of the Mesoamerican flood myth; and a second by fire embodies Indian traits but is identified with the advent of Christianity and the Spanish conquest. Some ver-